

Summer 6-15-2001

ENG 3009G-051-011: Myth and Culture

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Office 325 CH

Office hours: 9:45-10:30 a.m. M thru F

1. Course Objectives

To learn better the meanings of "myth"; to study and compare mythologies of different cultures; to discover how myth informs cultural values; to explore the differences between myth and science; and, most importantly, to realize more about yourself by better understanding the myths you do and don't live by.

2. Course Content

The myth, history, and science of baseball (and American sport in general), as it relates to Asian mythologies, selected Greek myths, Native American intuitions, and so forth. The style of class discussion will resemble what ballplayers in the Negro Leagues of the 1920's and 30's referred to as "Shadowball," playing a game without a ball, haunted by the myths of white sujemism and other forms of self-righteousness (I have the Answer to Life and I know I Do") all over the world. In the words, we'll play ball without a Ball, share ideas without The Idea—a form of jazz in the classroom, improvisations on a theme (the theme being whatever thought/feeling is in your heart and mind and soul, however shadowy). Other possibilities.

Popular mythologists such as Joseph Campbell and Alan Watts; philosophical discussion of myth; creation myths (e.g. Genesis); Greek myths (esp. Dionysus, Apollo, Orpheus, the Goddess); Black Orpheus (a Brazilian film, on reserve); Siddhartha (a novel influenced by Buddhism and Taoism); Woman in the Dunes (a Japanese film, on reserve); The Tao te Ching (the Taoist "bible"); selections from Dine Bahane and Black Elk Speaks (Native American mythologies).

(This content is flexible and can be altered according to the needs/desires of the class. Other texts can be included or substituted.)

3. Writing Requirements

Seven quizzes; unannounced; factual and interpretive questions.

A term paper, 2500-3000 words. Topic: Referring (in at least some detail) to most of the assigned texts, show what "myths" you don/don't live by, and why your life is/isn't purposeful, is/isn't meaningful. Due _____.

A journal. At least 1500 words weekly for 4 weeks; at least 3 entries a week; clearly dated; typed or written legibly every-other-line (illegible journals will be graded F). Dreams—your own or others' (if you remember your dreams, they can become a major part of your journal). Detailed interpretive responses to texts (readings and films) both before and after class discussions; but focus especially on (parts of) texts not discussed in class. Connections between texts and personal/social/political experience. The journal, of course, will be "rough" writing (spontaneous thoughts, feelings, memories, and associations recorded without worrying too much about organization or the mechanics of writing). Nevertheless, it should be considered a major work, a treasure. Criteria for evaluation: regularity, fullness, variety, thoughtfulness (originality) concreteness (detailed references to texts). Due _____.

4. Grading

The exams and term paper will be graded using a + / - system (e.g. B+, B- etc.). Criteria for evaluation: concreteness (detailed references to texts), clarity of thought and focus, grammar and other formal concerns, proofreading. The grade for the quizzes will be curved at the end of the semester.

5. Final grade

The final grade will be determined by weighing the various requirements as follows:

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Quizzes | 30% |
| Term paper | 30% |
| Journal | 30% |
| Class participation | 10% |

6. Attendance

Attendance is not required, but quizzes cannot be made up, without an officially excused absence.

7. Late papers

Late papers cannot be accepted.

8. Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

9. Since mythologies worship the primordial power and wonder of sex/creation, in this class we will discuss sexually explicit matters. To cite just one (surprising?) example, we'll discuss the scholar John Allegro's point that "The name Jesus/Joshua (the Greek and Hebrew forms) means 'the semen that heals' or 'fructifies,' the god-juice that gives life. To be smeared with this powerful liquid, above all to absorb it into his body, was to bring the worshipper of the 'Jesus' into living communion with God, indeed, to make him divine."

10. Plagiarism

If you cheat, please do me the favor of successfully deceiving me and don't treat me as if I were born yesterday (or born when you were born). Any cheating that I detect will lead to an F in the course for the guilty student.